



**Rep. Tom Huff**

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Olympia, WA 98504  
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Dear Friends,

Staying on course. That's the best way to describe our objectives during the short 60-day legislative session which has just convened in Olympia. The principles of the Republican leaders in the House of Representatives will continue to be:

- protecting taxpayers and improving the way government treats its citizens
- reshaping government to make it more accountable and responsible to the public
- and reducing unnecessary government interference in the lives of hard-working individuals and families.

Over the past three years, we have made remarkable progress in changing the way government works. We've adopted policies to get tough on violent crime, we've reformed our failed welfare system in order to get more people back to work, and we've set a new course for education that focuses on greater accountability and higher standards of learning. Since 1995 we've curbed government spending, reduced taxes by a billion dollars, and we have adopted policies that have stimulated strong, sustainable economic growth.

There is more to do. This report outlines some of the emerging issues that will require the Legislature's attention this session. As always, I welcome your ideas and questions. It is an honor to be working for you once again in Olympia.

Sincerely,

*Tom M. Huff*  
Tom Huff  
State Representative

## ► 26th District Activity Calendar

### 26th District Day Wednesday, February 18

Residents of the 26th District are invited to be our guests at the Capitol on Wednesday, February 18. Visitors will get a chance to tour the Capitol facilities, have a brown bag lunch with their local lawmakers, and watch their state government in action. For more information or to make reservations, please call 360.786.7802.

### Town Hall Meetings Saturday, February 21

You are invited to a Town Hall meeting on Saturday, February 21. Please join Rep. Tom Huff and Sen. Bob Oke at either of the following locations. Your local legislators will provide an update on the 1998 legislative session and give you an opportunity to ask questions and share your ideas.

Hope to see you there.

*Tom M. Huff*

### Town Hall Meeting Schedule

#### Port Orchard

10 a.m. - 11:30 a.m.  
Givens Center  
1026 Sidney Avenue

#### Gig Harbor

1:30 p.m. - 3 p.m.  
Fire Dist. #5 Headquarters  
10222 Bujacich Rd. N.W.

For more information or for special arrangements for people with disabilities, please call (360) 786-7802.

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**Rep. Tom Huff**  
P.O. Box 40600  
Olympia, WA 98504-0600

Budget surplus: what does it mean and what will the Legislature do

You’ve undoubtedly heard a great deal about the \$861 million state revenue surplus. Even though \$861 million sounds like an incredible sum of money, it could be spent several times over by every special interest group that would like to get its hands on it. This means the Legislature will have to prioritize and maintain its spending discipline. My philosophy on this is simple: It’s your money and it should be used in your best interest.

First, I think we should use a portion of the surplus to protect taxpayers from reductions in important services, such as education, when the state’s economy takes a downturn. Just like businesses and households that try to keep money in savings for emergencies, the state should keep a responsible level of savings for a rainy day.

*“Our first objective is to allow taxpayers to keep as much of their own money as possible.”*

This is a delicate balance, because our first objective is to allow taxpayers to keep as much of their own money as possible. But we refuse to go back to the days of budgeting by crisis. We will not engage in a spending spree only to enact spontaneous tax hikes at the first sign of economic trouble. It was that kind of tax-and-spend budgeting that occurred in the early part of this decade and culminated with a \$1 billion tax hike. With disciplined spending and a responsible reserve of \$500 million, we can sustain important services through the highs and lows of the inevitable economic cycles.

Of course, the Republican-controlled Legislature will continue to look at ways to reduce the tax burden on Washington citizens. With the passage of Referendum 47, we’ve cut the state property tax levy by nearly 5 percent and put tighter limits on all future property tax increases. We remain committed to further reducing the property tax burden on homeowners.

The Motor Vehicle Excise Tax (MVET) is another likely target for tax reductions. Republicans in the Legislature have proposed to reduce the MVET by \$40 per vehicle. Our plan also calls for shifting a portion of the MVET revenue to pay for \$2.4 billion in new highway improvements without raising the gas tax.

Creating better schools

We have a unique opportunity to make measurable progress in our quest for better schools in Washington. We have recently tested our state’s fourth-grade students based on new academic standards in math, reading, writing and listening. While a majority of students are not meeting the new standards in these areas, these initial tests have provided us with an important benchmark. We must insist on accountability in our schools and begin to identify and reward teaching methods that best help students learn and achieve measurable success.

Accountability

If we expect more in education, we will get more. The Legislature will be working to pass a bill this session requiring schools to set goals for improving student performance. The schools will be required to show that they are effectively bringing students up to the new standards in key subject areas.

Reading initiatives

We are glad to see that the governor has embraced the Legislature’s focus on reading, aimed at teaching every student to read by the third grade. We feel strongly that reading is the key to learning in all subject areas, and greater emphasis on reading performance will go a long way toward improving academic performance in our schools.

Charter schools

We will also be striving for agreement on a bill that will create innovation in education and provide more choices for Washington families. Charter schools are independent public schools that are able to incorporate unique methods of learning while being subject to the same academic and safety standards as other public schools.

Narrows Bridge funding should be fair

When I retired after 40 years in the corporate world and finally had the chance to choose where I wanted to live, I chose the Gig Harbor Peninsula. Clearly I’m not the only one who values the region for its many attributes. It offers beautiful settings, an energetic business community, and the best neighbors in the world. It’s no wonder that our primary link to the Puget Sound corridor is being pushed to its limits.

Congestion in the corridor now lasts three to four hours per day in each direction and is forecast to increase to as much as seven hours per day in each direction by 2020. Even more disturbing, from 1993 to 1995 alone there were 26 fatal and disabling injury accidents in the 15-mile stretch between Union Avenue and Purdy. These facts demand our attention. There are too many people being killed or seriously injured because of the bridge’s design, its steep inclines and its scenic distractions. The growing congestion coupled with the bridge’s dangerous features will only increase the risks.

There are a couple of conditions that I believe should be met as we work toward the State Route 16 solution:

- **First, I believe the proposed tolls that have been discussed are too high.** The tolls, if there are any, should be reduced to \$2 or less. I recognize the value and justification for such user fees to pay for transportation projects. We’ve employed tolls for virtually every span on a major arterial in the state, but the toll must not be prohibitive to working families and to our local economy.
- **State and federal funding should be provided to a degree that allows us to cut the tolls that are currently being proposed in half.** I’ll be working with other elected officials to ensure that the tolls, if there are any, are reasonable. I’ve met personally with Congressman Norm Dicks and we agree that State Route 16 is a highway of national significance. It is a strategic military highway that provides the critical connection from Bremerton and Bangor to the Fort Lewis and McChord military installations. We agree that the state and federal government need to step up to the plate to maintain this transportation corridor.
- **If we must have tolls, I will insist that they be used only to pay for the cost of the bridge.** Local residents should not have to shoulder the burden of improvements leading up to and away from the bridge.

In addition to supporting state and federal cost sharing, I will be sponsoring legislation to exempt this project from six different taxes, including the leasehold excise tax and sales tax on labor. By providing sufficient state and federal support, we can ensure that local citizens are not asked to bear an unfair share of the cost for the Narrows Bridge and SR 16 improvements.

Other transportation priorities

With so much attention being given to the Tacoma Narrows, there are other transportation issues in our communities that should not go unnoticed. I will be working to see that the state’s transportation plan addresses ferry service improvements needed at Southworth and much needed highway improvements, such as the Olalla-Burley overpass and safety improvements on Highway 302 and State Route 166.

Good government solution is good news for Rocky Bay

The best government solutions come from cooperative thinking and responsiveness. With this kind of approach, I’ve been able to facilitate a plan to repair the environmental degradation that has occurred at the Rocky Bay oyster beds. I’ve been working with the Department of Ecology, the Department of Transportation, Pierce County, and the Puget Sound Water Quality Action Team to clean up the contamination caused by runoff from septic systems in this area.

Like most environmental problems, the contamination of the oyster beds is a result of a chain of events that directs runoff from the road above, through a residential area, down through septic drain fields and into the bay. But rather than engaging in strong-arm regulatory tactics and finger pointing, the state agencies and private citizens have worked together to develop a win-win solution.

By redirecting runoff from Highway 302 away from the source of the contaminants, the bay can be rid of the pollutants. We anticipate the oyster beds will be productive again in two years. This clean-up plan was made possible by regulatory reform measures passed by the legislature and demonstrates how our efforts to reshape government have worked in the best interests of our citizens.